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SELECTIONS.

PICTURES AND PICTURE DEALING.

(Concluded.)

The temptations to trickery which picture-dealing offers are at least equalled in the sale of antiquities, which has long been an important trade at Rome and Naples. "You are well aware, sir, that this business of ours cannot be carried on without lies, and that we must always be a-telling of them: in fact, a man must just pocket his baptism when he sells objects of antiquity; is it not so, sir?" Such are the principles of the antiquarian fraternity, as explained to us by the faithful shopman of one of its Roman members: their practice may be illustrated by what occurred to his master many years ago. An English nobleman, who was known to devote his wealth liberally to the acquisition of antiques, having arrived in the Eternal City, V. forthwith commissioned a cameo, which he made sure would please the earl, from one of the best fabricators of antique gems, a class of artists then of real talent, and not necessarily parties to the impositions they created, as their works were valuable even as copies. A fine stone having been selected, it was finished in the best style, and committed to a jeweler to be set as a ring. In his hands it was casually broken to bits: the plot was defeated; the dealer was furious, but the victim was not saved. The wily Italian fell upon a device to render the bait more than ever deadly. Having selected a principal morsel of the cameo, he carried it to the peer, as a fragment just brought in by a peasant, which, though incomplete, rivalled the rarest gems in perfection of material and of art. After dwelling upon it with that mellifluous eloquence which only an Italian can employ to good purpose,—for in a language whose every syllable is euphony, even verbiage becomes effective,—he obtained for it a sum which far more than repaid his outlay. Now as some collectors of such relics so treasure those which time or violence has broken, as almost to give them a seeming preference, the lord and the dealer had perhaps equal reason to be satisfied with the transaction. But there were more fragments behind, so after pocketing the price and bowing himself out, V. returned to say, that as it would be a pity the rest of so lovely a work should be lost, he had desired the peasant to dig again for the other bits, in which he might very probably be successful. Next day he returned with another morsel, which he celebrated by another string of superlative epithets, and sold by another tissue of falsehoods, for another ransom; and that in due time was succeeded by the remaining fragments, all separately produced, separately puffed, and separately paid for, until in the end the accidental fracture of the stone proved to have quadrupled its price.

Let us now contrast English honor with Italian honesty. A nobleman, whose position in the intellectual society of our country is even higher than his rank in the peerage, when riding near Tivoli was offered a Roman bronze medal by a peasant, and bought it for half-a-crown. Being no great virtuoso, he showed it to some connoisseur, who pronounced it a coin of great rarity, and fine preservation, worth at least thirty dollars. Next time the peer visited Tivoli, he sought out the peasant and presented him with that sum.

Few topics connected with pictures are more interesting than the occasional discovery of some long lost or forgotten gem of art, and the anecdotes told of such are often highly curious. Some of these we shall now mention. Among the choice works added by the taste and liberality of Louis of Bavaria to the Pinacotheca at Munich, is the half-length Madonna, straining to her lips and bosom the infant Christ, commonly known as the Madonna del Tempi, from the Counts Tempi, of Florence, in whose possession it was discovered. A servant of the family happening to require medical assistance, a physician was conducted to the garret in which he lay. In that land where a feeling for art is inherent in the national character, connoisseurship is the especial ambition of many disciples of Galen. While the sufferer detailed his symptoms, the doctor's eyes were fixed upon a begrimed panel that hung over the bed. After prescribing for the case, he sought the count, and begged leave to examine the picture. Having refreshed its dusty surface, he recommended that it should immediately be cleaned, as he had little doubt of its being a good work of the school of Raffaele. This having been done, the doctor's judgment was fully confirmed. The picture was attributed to Raffaele himself, though some judges have ascribed it to Andrea del Sarto, and it was sold to King Louis for about £1,500.

Nor is this an isolated case at Munich. The fairest gem of the Leuchtenburg Gallery is the Madonna and Child, by Murillo, or, as some say, by Vandyke, a work excelled by few that ever left the easel of either of these great colorists. It is said to have been picked up in a small ale-house, near Ratisbon, by a

poor dealer, from whom it was acquired by Count Rechberg, and subsequently by Prince Eugene Beauharnois. So, too, the statue of Ilioneus, one of the sons of Niobe, which is esteemed the *chef d'œuvre* of the Glyptotheca, was found some years ago in the workshop of a mason at Dresden, to whom but five francs were paid for it, though the king was content subsequently to acquire it for £1,500.

In the celebrated cause of Vallati's Magdalen, to which we shall presently refer, evidence was adduced of this circumstance. A Madonna, Child, and St. John, originally in the Farnese family, which was inscribed on the back "a work of the divine Raffaele," and had been attested as genuine by a Pope, came some years since, by inheritance, to a Contessa Broglio, of Turin, who desired her porter to sell it for £32. Falling into the hands of one who recognized its merit, it was purchased from him by the Prince of Carignan, and now adorns the Royal Gallery, under the name of the Madonna della Tenda, from the curtain in the background. Another instance rests on the same authority. Among some trash rejected from the Florence Gallery, and sold some years ago by orders of the Grand Duke, a picture was bought by one Fieschi, a restorer. On being cleaned, it was acknowledged to be a Leonardo, and £900 was offered in vain to its fortunate purchaser. Again, Professor Tosoni, of Milan, has a beautiful little allegorical picture, which he considers by Raffaele, and values at four thousand louis d'or, but for which he paid an English gentleman £42.

There is in Italy a class of picture-jobbers, who wander on foot among the towns and villages, with a scanty purse, and still more slender knowledge of art, picking up for a few shillings such things as their very restricted funds place within their reach. These they carry to their booth or cellar in one of the capitals, whither resort the poorer classes, when conscience or piety suggests the addition of a Madonna, or a favorite Saint, to the devotional garniture of their humble homes. There, too, may ever and anon be seen some lynx-eyed dealer, or some shrewd amateur, turning over piles of shattered panels, and disturbing the dust of canvas shreds, in eager search after speculative bits. Among such hucksters, the resurrectionists of art, a certain Luzzi well known at Rome. His shop is a lumber-house of the veriest daubs, and the street-entrance is flanked by lines of glaring martyrdoms and contorted Madonnas, fit to scare away saints and sinners. Yet from the interior have issued not a few dinky pictures, which, in the hands of able restorers, have cast off their chrysalis coatings, and emerged in their native purity and brilliancy.

About the time when the cholera broke out at Rome in 1837, Luzzi returned from a circuit among the mountains of Umbria, that cradle of Christian art, wherein were reared the great founders of the Roman school of painting. In the house of the Caccarelli at Spoleto, he found a new wonder of the world, a picture attributed to Raffaele, and priced at a few crowns. Though the sum exceeded the usual limits of this worthy's investments, he was induced by some good genius to nibble at the bait, and eventually carried it off for twenty-four shillings and sixpence. Resolved to do all justice to his speculation, he gave it to a restorer, who, wishing simply to entitle himself to a certain fee for his labors, found this most readily effected by gaudily over-painting the draperies, distances, and sky, leaving alone the heads, hands, and foregrounds, for which a more delicate handling was even in his eyes desirable. This done, the newly-found Raffaele was announced to the trade; but whilst the few dealers who had not fled from the pestilence, gazed, and hesitated, and higgled, Luzzi began to suspect he had got something better than an every-day Raffaele. The longer they looked, the higher rose his demands; at length the Chevalier Hawson, agent for the Portuguese government at the papal court, carried off the prize from the doubters, for about £76, and a few indifferent pictures. The over-daubing having been removed, and the surface carefully cleaned, the picture appeared in its original beauty, and in a rare purity of preservation. It is one of this artist's few productions from the old Testament, and represents three youths restored to life by the prophet's mantle. Although hitherto unknown, its genuineness seems to have escaped question, and it is estimated by the chevalier at £4,000.

Only last summer Luzzi made another fortunate hit. Among some pictures which he bought from the march of Ancona, was a *Pieta*, with figures of life-size, wherein the Madonna wept over the lifeless body of the crucified Saviour, which she supported in her lap, whilst two cherubs joined in her lamentations. The torso was so much more masterly than the draperies, and the beard and other accessories had so suspicious a texture, as to occasion a doubt whether the picture was in a pure state. A skilful cleaner soon solved the riddle, by removing the dark blue mantle of woe which shrouded the Virgin's head, when there emerged a Venus radiant in plaintive beauty, bewail-

ing the premature fate of her beloved, Adonis, whose exquisitely modelled limbs had been transformed into a frame rigid with long agony. It was a still simpler process to restore the mourning cherubs into tearful cupids, and to baptize as an Annibale Caracci a really good picture which had probably cost a few dollars, but for which five hundred louis d'or are now demanded.

There is one other case which requires a more special notice, from the universal interest it has lately excited in Rome, as well as from its very extraordinary circumstances, and the view it affords of Roman justice. In 1723, a quantity of pictures, sculptures, and other moveables from the palace of Duke Flavio Orsini, were judicially deposited in charge of Duke Aloysio Lante, to abide the claims of the Orsini creditors. After much tedious litigation, Prince Odescalchi succeeded, in 1826, in establishing his claims upon this property, as creditor of the representatives of Duke Flavio, to the amount of some £6,000, and thereupon obtained a warrant of sale. A judicial valuation was then made of the effects by Philip Agricola, now at the head of the Roman school of painting, and a Magdalen in the Desert, about eighteen inches by sixteen, was therein stated as a copy done in the school of the Caracci, from the original in the Dresden gallery, and was set down at thirty scudi, or £6 6s. The auction took place in February and April, 1827, and realized nearly £500, which sum, with the property remaining unsold, was adjudged to Prince Odescalchi, under the valuation wherein the Magdalen had been esteemed at thirty scudi. About two years later, the prince offered these things to a picture-dealer, who declined the purchase, and they remained neglected until 1835, when, in consequence of part of the palace being let, several attempts were made by Zarlatta, the house-steward, to get these, and other pictures which were in the way, disposed of among the trade in Rome. One of the persons called in to look at them was the Chevalier Vallati, a distinguished painter of boar-hunts, who at that time speculated in old pictures along with Mr. Jones, an English banker settled there, and who was brought by a *sensale* or low agent employed by the steward. After an ineffectual attempt to come to terms for a lot of considerable value, Vallati took up the Magdalen, and observing that it was one of the numerous copies after Correggio, said that he would give ten dollars for it. Zarlatta had shortly before shown it to another Roman dealer, who called it a bad copy of the Dresden picture, faulty in the head and arm, and thought it would be well sold for fifteen dollars. On reporting Vallati's offer to the prince, the latter said it should be accepted, as the pictures in that lot were of small moment. Accordingly, it was the next day sold to Vallati for fifteen dollars, or £3 3s., and a receipt given which stated it to be a copy from Correggio.

The picture was executed in oil, upon copper, but is described as then entirely overpainted. The original composition and outline had been generally followed, but the flesh-tints were glazed over, and other parts so thickly daubed, that the paint adhered to a glass which covered the surface, and beneath which dirt and dust were thickly clotted. Whether these liberties had been used with the idea of improving or disguising its merits, it is agreed that they gave the picture the air of a coarse copy. Still, when Vallati began to examine it, after it had lain for about four months in his studio forgotten, he perceived a certain fineness of handling in minute portions of it, which augured better things, and with some difficulty he persuaded Cocchetti, the most skilful restorer in Rome, to put it in order. The latter at first paid little attention to the task, which he carried on at Vallati's; but, finding a better surface under the coarse paint, he was induced to persevere, and, in about nine months of occasional work, he accomplished it with perfect success. The usual solvents and processes being quite ineffectual to remove the over-paint, in consequence of its having been laid on with oil, and not with varnish or distemper, he had recourse to pumice-stone, and even to sharp razors, with which he very gradually, and with the utmost caution, rasped and scraped away the extraneous coating, till the picture remained in its purity. This operation cost £150, and its result was a great triumph of skill and perseverance.

Delighted with his treasure, Vallati allowed his joy to exceed his discretion. The circumstances, at first confided as a secret to a few, became, ere November, 1836, was over, the subject of discussion among the *dilettanti*, and the Magdalen was talked of as a long-lost original by Correggio, worth from £4,000 to £6,000. Prince Odescalchi, ere long, resolved to interfere: relying upon an edict by the Cardinal Camerlengo (the official guardian of antiquities and art) for the purpose of checking the removal of objects of value from Rome, he presented a complaint, stating what had occurred; and, on the allegation that it was about to be sold to a foreigner, prayed that an embargo might be laid upon the picture. Accordingly, Vallati was ordered to produce it, on pain of

imprisonment, and the Cardinal remitted it for the judgment of the Academy of St. Luke. In March, the committee of painters there, including eight of the leading Italian and German artists at Rome, unanimously recognized the great value and beauty of the work; but on the question of its authorship they were divided, two considering it by Correggio, four thinking it was not, and two being doubtful. The Cardinal, upon this, obliged Vallati to come under heavy recognizances for the production of the picture when required, which, meanwhile, was restored to his possession.

Having thus secured its retention within the jurisdiction of the Roman courts, the prince raised a civil action for nullifying the sale, on the ground of error, false consideration, and enormous injury, alleging that his agents had sold for a trifle, under the impression that it was a worthless copy, a fine original by Correggio or some other great master. In December, 1838, judgment was pronounced against Vallati, rescinding the contract, and ordaining him to restore the picture, on receiving from Odescalchi the original price, and the sum spent in cleaning it. This sentence proceeded on the want of legal consent of the vendor, in consequence of error, and inferred that Vallati might have previously discovered the value of the work, so as not to be in good faith when purchasing it at the price of a bad copy. Against this decision Vallati appealed; and after a bitter litigation, protracted till 1842, a compromise was made. The picture was to be sold, and the price divided between the parties, each paying his own costs. Vallati states his expenses at nearly £800, and estimates his adversary's somewhat higher. Mr. Jones had previously paid a sum to Vallati, to be free of all share in the transaction, being obliged to return to England in bad health, where he soon after died.

We give these details of the great Vallati cause, as they have formed a leading topic in the Roman circles during several winters, and as they illustrate some curious phases of Italian picture-dealing. A rich English nobleman was last year on terms for the Magdalen, when a party, from alleged interested motives, conveyed to him the reported dictum of Mr. Woodburn, that it was an old copy worth £500. Signor Vallati, however, offers to prove that Mr. Woodburn never saw the picture at all, but only a copy recently made from it, imitating its time-worn texture, which hung outside of the sanctum wherein it lay. Thus the chevalier has been doubly unlucky in the results of his fortunate speculation. He was deprived of his purchase by the Roman courts, because the best judges in Italy pronounced it an original of the highest value. He had lost his purchaser, because an English picture-dealer, blundering between his gem and a modern imitation of it, declared it a copy. Verily may the tribe of dealers call their trade "a hazard;" and the Italian prince may compare notes with the English peer, which of them is the greater gull.

Signor Vallati has, however, had his triumph, in another incident illustrative of the chances of picture-selling. Having acquired a singular and very beautiful landscape, in which a bit of savage Swiss scenery was treated with much originality, he baptized it a Rembrandt, although this opinion was demurred to by some persons acquainted with the usual specimens of that master. Mr. Woodburn at once pronounced it no Rembrandt, but declined naming the author, and the picture consequently remained on hand with a blighted reputation. An English gentleman, whose interest and curiosity in the work had been greatly roused, while closely examining it one day with a powerful magnifier, thought he could distinguish on the grassy foreground some lines of colder tint, resembling a cypher. In the enthusiasm of the moment, he bought the landscape for £300, and then begged Vallati to apply the usual test, in order to see if any repainting could be detected there. On being strongly rubbed with spirits, a portion of the foreground came away, and the monogram of Rembrandt, which some ignorant restorer had covered, in patching an adjoining hole, became legible, but resisted all further trial to remove it. The gentleman was equally delighted with his casual discovery and his purchase; and although Vallati, had he been aware of this proof of its authenticity, might have set a higher value upon the prize, yet he had the satisfaction of finding his deliberate judgment confirmed, at the expense of Mr. Woodburn's infallibility.

The circumstances narrated in the Vallati suit may put purchasers of works of art in the Papal States on their guard against a double risk; first, that of having their acquisitions stopped by government, in case they be deemed of sufficient importance; and secondly, the nullification or the sale at the instance of the seller, should the price turn out to have been inadequate. The former of these hazards exists also in Tuscany and Naples, and all old pictures and sculptures for exportation ought to be examined by an officer appointed to this duty, without whose clearance they are liable

to be stopped at the custom-house. Nor is this law by any means a dead letter, although very rarely applied. It is generally understood that all the personal influence at the papal court of King Louis of Bavaria, the most catholic of reigning sovereigns, was required to sanction his removing the celebrated drunken faun, which he had purchased from the Barberini family,—one of the most choice though hideous statues of antiquity, and now a principal ornament of the Glyptotheca at Munich. At this moment a bronze bust of Bindo Altovito, by Bevenuto Cellini, is embargoed in the deserted palace of that family at Rome, in consequence of the Camerlengo's refusal to let its owner remove it to his residence in Florence. The latter has shut it closely up, either from pet, or in the hope of smuggling it out unobserved, to prevent which spies are incessantly on the watch. It seems a monstrous hardship, that a man shall not be able to remove a family portrait from his deserted habitation to his actual residence, and still more when the real motive is to compel him to part with it to a foreign government on their own terms. A well-known and recent instance was that of Count Marescalchi's Correggio, which had actually been sold at Bologna, and, as we believe, delivered to a French gentleman, but which the count was compelled to get back, and surrender to the Vatican for a smaller sum. Duke Braschi last year resigned to the government without a struggle his famous Antinous for about £1,850, though no doubt more might have been obtained abroad, had the secret abduction of so colossal a statue been practicable. The removal of the Fesch pictures goes on unquestioned, under a special permission obtained by the cardinal ere he removed them from Paris: it remains to be seen whether some of those acquired by him subsequently may not be stopped. A friend of our own met with a persecution at Rome in 1839, very similar to that endured by Vallati, in regard to a misal of unique beauty, with signed miniatures by Perugino, Francia, and their best pupils, which he had openly purchased a year before from Prince Albani, and, but for his prudence in sending it to England on the first alarm, he would unquestionably have been robbed of his prize. It may be well to add, that all objects of old art enter the Roman States duty free, but are liable to an ad-valorem duty of twenty per cent. on exportation, whilst modern productions pay only on entering. In Tuscany the rule is reversed, a duty being exigible on the import of old objects, but none on their export. At Naples, the export duty on pictures is a dollar for each square palm of ten inches. The sale of pictures from churches is permitted by the government of Tuscany, but much discountenanced by that of Rome.

Picture-dealing has its drones, who fatten upon its profits without contributing the knowledge, labor, or capital which produce them. They are embodied in the form of couriers and *laquais de place*, two fraternities who assume the privilege of exacting unjust gains upon every transaction into which they can thrust their officious services, but especially upon their masters' dilettanti purchases. The usual rate is from five to ten per cent. upon the price, but it is sometimes screwed up to five-and-twenty. A few years ago there was a very beautiful and perfect femalesuit of armour exposed for sale, in a curiosity shop at Geneva, for £80; one evening an English gentleman strolled in with his courier, admired it greatly, made no objection to the price, and said he would call and make the bargain next morning. Soon after, the courier returned and demanded £20 as his fee on the sale. The shopman said he would willingly allow him the usual amount, but could do no more in his master's absence. The servant replied, that he would take care that his master did not come again to the shop, and he kept his word. This discount comes of course indirectly out of the purchaser's pocket, and it is very common to be asked, when bargaining at shops of that sort, whether you have a *valet de place* in attendance, that the price may be adjusted accordingly. Half-a-dozen years since, the valets at Bologna combined to raise their fee to ten per cent., threatening to prevent strangers from visiting any sale gallery where these terms were not acceded to, upon which some of the dealers, to defeat the plot, forwarded their address cards to the frontier, and bribed the police agents to fold them up in the passports of travellers.

Among the evidence offered in the suit of Prince Odescalchi against Vallati, to which we have more than once referred, there was this formal exposition of the principles and results of picture-dealing, sworn to by eighteen leading members of the trade then in Rome:

"In the sale and purchase of pictures, all depends upon the actual result and chance of gain common to both parties. For pictures which are bought in the hope of discovering something better than appears, and of reproducing them in their original state, often turn out even worse than they seemed, thus occasioning manifest loss. And were it not that in rare instances and after much outlay, risk, and trouble, a

fortunate hit compensates for many previous sacrifices, this trade would be at an end; for without such a hope no one would be disposed to make acquisitions that were always to turn out ill. Another danger to which those who carry on this sort of business are exposed, arises from the difficulty of finding an able restorer, so that even when they have the luck to meet with anything good, it is generally injured in being cleaned. Besides all this, there must be taken into consideration the large sums tied up in those pictures which remain on hand for years, as well as the great labor and application necessary for obtaining a thorough acquaintance with this most difficult subject. In all these transactions, advantages and risks, the private party selling has no part, for the result, as regards profit and loss, is limited to the speculative buyer exclusively."

With this manifesto we might conclude our notices of picture-dealing, but that a new phasis which the trade has recently assumed in the Eternal City remains to be mentioned. Bassaggio and Baldeschi, two dealers, who stand favorably conspicuous among their fellows for enterprise, connoisseurship, and good faith, have been making frequent journeys to London and Paris, for the acquisition of works of art; and, we have little hesitation in believing that the pictures brought to Rome by the former from London, in the last three years, exceed in merit all that have been sent from thence to England during the same time. Regular in his attendance on auctions, vigilant among the rubbish of Wardour-street, he has secured many prizes for sums which enable him to offer them in his own country at unusually moderate rates. Nor are his purchases confined to the purlieus of picture-traffic. In 1842, the Litchfield Claude passed into his hands, and last year he carried off a very rare specimen of Rodolfo Ghirlandajo, one of the greatest Florentine painters, which is not unlikely to enrich the Vatican gallery of *chefs d'œuvres*. The chances of such works returning to our shores are at present small, for fox-hunting has greatly superseded picture-buying at Rome, as far as our wealthy countrymen are concerned. Artists and dealers suffer equally from this caprice of fashion; but both still look to the English as their surest and most liberal customers. It is not long since we heard a worthy Dutch landscape-painter narrate in broken English the following incident:

"I work in my studio one day ven one gentleman wid de *lunettes* come in, make one, two, tree bow, very profound, and say, '*Gut morgen, Meinheer!*' I make one, two, tree profound bow, and say de same. Den de gentleman look at all my picture very slow and deliberate: den he say, '*Dat is goot; dat is beautiful; dat is vondrous fine.*' Den he say at last, '*Sare, vil you permit me to bring my friend de Baron von A. to see your fine work?*' I say, '*Sare, you vil do me one favor.*' Den he make tree more bow more profound dan before, and he go vay. De next day he bring his friend de Baron, and dey two make six bow all very profound, and dey say dat all is very beautiful, and den de Baron say, '*Sare, vil you let me bring my friend de Count von A. to see dese so fine work?*' and den dey make der bow once again and go vay, and I see dem no more. Dat vas one German gentleman."

"Another day, one little gentleman come in wid one skip and say, '*Bon jour, Monsieur! charmé de faire votre connaissance.*' He take up his *lorgnette*, and he look at my first picture, and he say, '*Ah, very vell, Sare! dat is one very fine morsel.*' Den he pass quick to another, and he say, '*Sare, dis is truly admirable; after dis beautiful nature is vort nothing?*' and so in two minute and a half he get trough dem all. Den he twirl his cane, and stick out his chin, and say, '*Sare, I make you my complement; you have one great talent for de landscape; I shall have de honor to recommend you to all my friend; au revoir, Monsieur;*' but I see him never again. He vas one French gentleman."

"Another day, I hear one loud tap wid one stick at my door, and ven I say, '*Come in,*' one gentleman walks forwards, very stiff and nod his head, but tako never his hat off. He say, '*May I see your picture?*' I bow and say, '*Wid pleasure, sare.*' He no answer, but look at one a long time, and say not a vord. Den he look at another and say nothing. Den he go to another and look, and say, '*Vat is de price of dis?*' I say, '*Forty louis, Sare.*' He say nothing but go to de next, and look one long time; and at last he say, '*Vat is de price of dis?*' Den I say, '*Sare, it is sixty louis.*' Den he say nothing but look another long time. Den he say, '*Can you give me pen and ink?*' and ven I give it he set down and he say, '*Vat is your name, Sare?*' Den I give him my card, and he write one order on Torlonia for sixty louis: he give me de order wid his card, and he say, '*Dat picture is mine; dat is my address; send it home: good morning.*' And so he make one more stiff nod and walk away. This vas one English gentleman."

There is one view in which picture-dealing becomes matter of public interest among ourselves, as regards the formation of our National Gallery. It has been

alleged, in several instances, that the additions made to it seem to be tested chiefly by the amount of their cost. Now, it appears to us, that it is not with the trustees that the fault lies, of a system which has given us the smallest, and dearest, if the most select gallery in Europe. The purchase of the Angerstein pictures, however languidly planned by the ministry, was nobly carried through by Parliament. The opportunities lost by their predecessors during the convulsions of the war were unlikely to recur. One individual had taken advantage of them in the finest spirit, and had secured, perhaps, the only private collection worthy of being the nucleus for a national one. Such circumstances precluded the carping of candle-parers, and, if the price had been double, it was well earned, and wisely given. But what were the next steps in this new and praiseworthy direction? The appointment of trustees or commissioners to make further acquisitions was probably incumbent, as the cost was to be borne by the community. But where else did it ever enter into the arrangements of a cabinet to submit to the critical fiat of 645 legislators the price of a Durer, the originality of a Guido, or the purity of a Perugino? Few Britons are, perhaps, aware of the preposterous fact, that each purchase made for the Trafalgar-square rooms is the subject of a parliamentary estimate, and is liable to an *ex-post-facto* discussion in the House of Commons, when the expediency and worth of the investment, and the judgment of the trustees, are at times rudely and unjustly assailed by men totally incapable of forming an idea on these matters. But there is a standard of pictorial merit comprehensible even by utilitarian critics,—the price paid. It has originated in what is at least a novel idea, that all high-priced works must be fine ones; and, in that conviction, even our economists become generous, lest they should be humbugged. Whilst saving prevails in the other estimates, and cheap production is the object for which machines are made to whirl, and workmen to languish, the old sneer of "cheap and nasty" remains a term of reproach only in the fine arts. Provided pictures are but dear, they are sure to be respected in a committee of supply; and if extracted from a celebrated collection, they are presumed to be exempt from criticism. Conforming to these circumstances, the trustees buy only works of established celebrity, and, consequently, of extravagant price. Now, did the money thus superfluously charged against the nation go into the pockets of our first artists, the blunder would have our sympathy, but against its enriching speculators we do most seriously protest.

Yet a few words as to the principle of selection which has in general been adopted by the trustees. But whilst we attempt to show the fallacious course they have sometimes pursued, we are far from imputing any deficiency of zeal, still less any impurity of intention, to the eminent gentlemen who gratuitously discharge to their country a most onerous and obnoxious duty. If the main objects to be attained from a national gallery of high art be the instruction of its visitors, and the guidance of the public taste, it follows, that excellence is not the sole consideration to be kept in view while forming it. Thus, the Madonna is the leading theme among the greatest painters in the best age of art, and the Roman stands foremost among the schools of its golden days. Yet what should we say of a national gallery composed altogether of Madonnas, or consisting exclusively of Raffaele and his pupils? Do we not, on the contrary, expect to find there specimens of whatever is worth knowing, as well as what is deemed fit to occupy a student's pencil. Great libraries are not formed solely for the preservation of fine paper copies of standard and popular authors, and why should it be so with galleries? The great foreign schools of painting have belonged to Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, and France. Of these, the first is unquestionably pre-eminent, and next in importance may be ranked that of Holland and the Low Countries, as unrivalled in *genre* painting. Germany, among us who have borrowed so much from Holbein and Rubens, is entitled to the third place, and Spain and France must conclude the list. Again, the Italian schools are at least twelve in number, each with its own type, more or less distinctly developed. Thus we have about twenty different manners, or classes of painting, to look for in a great public gallery. Now, without attempting to analyze the contents of the Trafalgar-square rooms under this view, it is enough to say, that the schools of Sienna, Genoa, Sicily, and Upper and Lower Germany, are totally excluded; those of Florence, Naples, Milan, Umbria, and Spain, virtually so. These are startling deficiencies in a national collection, even though it numbers but few lustres. But a greater discouragement awaits the student of art, in the total absence of any pictorial work (except by Van Eyk) executed prior to 1500, that being close upon the time when high art is admitted to have attained its culminating point, and when, according to some critics, it was already on the wane. Now, whether these be just

opinions or not, is just what a national gallery ought to enable us to decide by well selected specimens, and we trust, that instead of adding to our already rich store of Bolognese and French works, the trustees will take measures to procure some fine productions of the medieval masters. The moment is favorable, but it is quickly passing. Had they come into the market a few years ago, with the sovereigns of Prussia and Bavaria, they would have found the supply ample and the prices mean. Now this taste has become a fashion, and must be gratified at fashionable cost. Every day the comparatively few pieces in high preservation are picked up by foreign governments, or are undergoing from speculators barbarous retouches in oil, and daubings of varnish, which all but disqualify them for the illustration of art. Yet even now there may be found in some secluded mountain church or remote convent, grand altar-pieces in distemper which preserve the type of the Giottoists, or upon which the highest Christian masters of Umbria or Sienna have traced an almost inspired purity of feeling. It is true, that the prices which would extract these from their simple possessors are numbered but in dollars; this, however, need be no fatal objection, as the interested intermediation of the wonted agents might transmute the sum into any amount of sovereigns deemed sufficient to stamp the merit of the pictures.

The improvements desirable upon the present mode of acquiring pictures for the Gallery are, we venture to think, two-fold. Instead of subjecting each purchase to a special vote and discussion in Parliament, a fixed annual sum should be placed at the disposal of a competent body of trustees for investment in pictures as occasion may offer, under an obligation to publish yearly the amount actually so expended, with the particular inducements or grounds on which each choice was made. The benefit to the trustees of such a plan is obvious, from its leaving their hands unfettered, and their judgment uncontrolled: the public would at the same time have the advantage of comprehending their views, and of watching with increased interest and intelligence the progress of the collection; and as it would no longer be necessary to tell the price in order to have a negotiation ratified, these gentlemen would dare to buy where, when, and for as little money as they could; and though they might continue to bribe Beckfords and Londonderrys out of their choicest gems, they would compensate such exceptional extravagance by many snug little bargains for which they could not now ask a particular vote. In order to effect such bargains, our second innovation would be required. There is at present a rule or understanding, that the trustees buy nothing that is not sent for their inspection in London, and a most convenient defence it must be against jobbing and imposition. But they ought to, and sooner or later must, get many things which will never be brought on chance to the great Babel, nor dangle attendance there. If the continental sovereigns had acted thus, would the Houghton and Coesvelt Galleries be now in St. Petersburg; or would those truly splendid ones of Munich and Berlin have started into full manhood, during the years when ours has attained a very stunted adolescence? Each of these monarchs, as well as Louis Philippe, has agents in every part of Italy, to report the discovery or occurrence of anything interesting in antique or mediæval art, and thus many objects are secured by them which never were, and perhaps never would have been, thrown into the open market. To do this, without being imposed upon by ignorant zeal or interested meanness, must require considerable management; but as it seems to answer in these cases, and in the transactions for the British Museum, it is difficult to see why it should fail, if judiciously introduced in supplement of the present system, which has hitherto neither produced abundant fruits, nor proved an efficient protection against the high profits of speculators.

A few words, ere we close this discursive article, as to English students of art in Italy. It is the misfortune of most of them to go out unprepared by proper education for the career which they have perhaps rashly chosen. They are generally even ignorant of the important truth, that in no profession is extensive and varied knowledge more necessary to eminent success. History, in all its branches; biography, rich in dramatic touches; poetry, with its imaginative stores; physiology, not less of the mind and passions than of the limbs and muscles;—these are but a few of the studies which ought to relieve the more technical labors of the painter and the sculptor. In the olden time, it was usual for the same men to excel in architecture, engineering, and geometry, in painting, sculpture, and silver-chasing; indeed, not a few of the foremost artists gave a portion of their time to politics and diplomacy. But these days are gone by, and it now too often frequently happens that men, who have raised themselves by artistic talent above the sphere of their birth, are unfitted by education for the social position which they have attained. But the deficiency most immediately baffling to a student is his ignorance

of modern languages, and of the history of art. Indeed, no literature of a refined people is so wanting as our own in artistic works, original or translated. The English version of Lanzi is insufficient to infuse a taste and knowledge of Italian painting into an entire people, and Kugler's Handbook, in itself over-appreciated, is useful to those only who are already versant in the subject. Our students have thus few materials for private study, besides the discourses of Sir Joshua, and the Essays of Fuseli, Hazlitt, and Haydon, and having mastered these, each fancies himself well read in his future profession. Accustomed at home to spend all his working hours over his portfolio or his pallet, he has never contemplated familiarising himself with modern tongues, so as to render them a relaxation. He finds himself in Paris or Rome, scarcely able to ask his way, and without a means of acquiring information from the people, or the books around him. The dissipation of mind, and perhaps of habits, induced by the endless novelties and temptations of his new situation, prevents his applying to the irksome task of grammar, and, after a year or two's absence, he returns almost as unlettered as he went.

His professional studies thereby suffer immensely. In the galleries of Milan, Bologna, and Florence, he finds himself before pictures which he has by chance been told are fine; but whose authors he never before heard named, and as to whose era or school he never dreams of troubling himself. Thus, wandering on from wall to wall, his eyes get dazzled, his ideas become a chaos, and he learns little more from these glorious works than a Chinese would do; or, if his organ of wonder chance to be strongly developed, he gazes on each new picture with an undistinguishing enthusiasm, which effaces the impression made by all the preceding ones. With wearied nerves and disappointed hopes, he turns to the churches most famed for mural paintings of the fifteenth century. There he becomes entirely non-plussed, for he can scarcely form a conjecture as to the themes before him, wherein he discerns only a crowd of figures artificially grouped, a cluster of heads surrounded by golden sconces, and a pervading flatness deficient in color and chiaroscuro. Thus inclosed in a labyrinth without a clue, he falls back upon the only principles of faith he ever imbibed—namely, that color and effect constitute a picture, and that, next to Reynolds or Lawrence, the best painter is Paul Veronese. He recalls the gaudy walls of the Royal Academy, decides that Englishmen have nothing to learn from other nations, and either packs his portmanteau to be off on the morrow, or, if he sets up his easel, it is in the fond hope of finding a countryman to commit to canvas, with true English effect, or a subject in *genre* or landscape likely to sell in some provincial exhibition, and replace part of the money his fruitless journey has cost him. He heeds not the grand works of the old masters among which he lives, and returns to his native land as ignorant and more conceited than when he left it. Should he in after life become alive to the fact, that former times sent forth giants, before whose genius the pigmies of our day dwindle into their just proportions, he will lament deeply the lost opportunities of his student days. As yet, however, such repentance has been rare, for it would be profitless among a people who value little that leads not directly to gain; and until the contemplated decorations of our palace of parliament began to shed a golden light upon historic art, we doubt if ten Royal Academicians had studied Masaccio and Perugino, or had heard of Pinturicchio and Ghirlandajo.

Our description of the doings of English artists on their arrival in Italy is noways exaggerated; and some of them continue faithful to the like observances during a prolonged residence. We remember the *début* of one at Florence some years ago. No sooner settled than he hurried to the gallery, and passing rapidly by or through the tribune, reached the portrait-room of painters. There, in an obscure corner, he at length found something to admire. Not the fresco of Masaccio, that personification of power without the appearance of study; not the head of Raffaele, embodying the sentiment of pure beauty; but the snub features of Harlow, depicted by their owner's slovenly brush. The imitation of Sir Joshua, if not happy, was palpable; our friend at once measured the canvas, and in two days was copying what he doubtless regarded as the gem of the gallery, quite forgetting that he might have studied Harlow without journeying to Florence. Such was the outset in Italy of one whose annual productions have now no want of puffers or purchasers in England.

Of such a student as we have supposed, Rome, however, is probably the head-quarters, and there he discovers attractions amid which his first disappointment evaporates. He is frankly received into the circle of his professional countrymen, among fifty or sixty of whom he falls in with kindred spirits. He finds the more exemplary of them wedded to two ideas:—the necessity of securing the most celebrated models months in advance, and the propriety of a regular

attendance at the British Life Academy. He follows the fashion in both respects, and should the latter task sometimes seem irksome, the three hours which it demands are preceded by a jovial *trattoria* dinner, interrupted by a lounge in the smoking-room, and followed by cigars and gossip at the *café*. In truth the whole student life of these men is what is termed in the Italian idiom, "too material"—too much time and thought are given to self, too little bestowed on art. Instead of striving to comprehend the feeling, or imitate the execution of a Raffaele or a Rubens, they ape the picturesque costume of these painters. Many of them seem to limit their rivalry of the old masters to the cut of their beavers, or the hirsute horrors of their beards, and study rather to caricature their own personal appearance, than to perfect the figures upon their canvases. But there is yet a hope of better things. The cry raised from their native shores for a higher pictorial style has been responded to, and within a few weeks the students at Rome, in the face of a factious opposition, organised by a few more self-sufficient and bigoted seniors, have voluntarily placed their academy under the instruction of Professor Minardi, an artist whose modesty and good feeling are as remarkable as his fine taste and purity of design. Should he meet with fair play from the minority who opposed his appointment, much benefit may be looked for from his ministrations; but if he be thwarted by such unfair and ungentleman-like opposition as is threatened by the dissentients, it will behave the friends of the academy to withdraw from it their countenance, until some higher authority end these disgraceful squabbles, by putting the establishment upon a footing which shall at once secure its discipline, and promote its utility.

How entirely different from these Anglican habits is the life of German artists in the Eternal City! Prepared by reading the rich artistic stores of their own literature, and its abundant translations, most of them have been selected by their respective governments as likely to do credit to the small pension allowed them. It is barely adequate to their wants, affording them no facilities for dissipation; but it renders them independent of interruption from private commissions, and it is continued for such a term of years as enables them thoroughly to master the language, as well as the pictorial history of the Peninsula. Under this system, the Germans are plodding students, bound to each other, and to their common pursuit, by every tie of country and sympathy; whilst the English are loiterers, left to waste or misapply their opportunities. Under it, Overbeck and Cornelius, Veit and Schnorr, Schwanthaler and Gruner, have effected an entire renovation of art, and have enshrined their names in a niche far higher than their British contemporaries have, as yet, approached.

But as this is not the place for discussing the relative merit of modern German and British art, we shall conclude with a single remark. There is surely less egotism in trying to comprehend the deep feeling of the early masters, than in sneering at "Perugino and the pasteboard school," more good sense in attempting to renovate the styles of Raffaele and Ghirlandajo, than in talking about Michael Angelo, without daring to study him; or in imitating Veronese, without equalling Tiepolo. No man in his senses charges Laurence with servility to Sir Joshua, or Landseer with plagiarisms from Schnyders; yet their approximation to these prototypes is surely not less decided than are the cartoons of Overbeck to those of Raffaele. Man is proverbially an imitative creature, and if we are to follow the path which another has explored, why judge most harshly of such as aspire to tread in the footsteps of one whom all ages honor, and whom all but our countrymen appreciate?

CORRESPONDENCE OF THE BULLETIN.

LONDON, 18th July, 1850.

To the Editor of the Art-Union Bulletin:

SIR,—What may be termed the London Picture Season is now nearly over; and in a few weeks the British Institution Exhibition of works by the Old Masters, contributed from private collections, will be the only one remaining open.

During the next two months, the studios will be mostly closed, and their occupants scattered abroad, sketching and laying up stores for future use. The English landscape painters are very indefatigable in the study of nature for two or three months in the year; and, indeed, it is becoming very much the practice to take a spread of canvas into the country, and, having

taken pains to select a subject, to set up the easel and paint it on the spot. Many of Creswick's most successful pictures have been thus produced; and, undoubtedly, a certain freshness and smell of nature is obtained by these means which is apt to evanesce in the studio, where the sketches only are made use of, and the picture made up from them. Of course, literal resemblance is adhered to, according to the taste and judgment of the artist. The feeling in favor of *rigid* portraiture, however, is rather on the advance here—a feeling which, I think, is very open to question, as it tends to raise the mere manipulative artist into a rank and appreciation to which he has no right. Mechanical dexterity is, I may say, the leading sin of the landscape painters of this school. You see in all the exhibitions crowds of pictures in which this quality predominates over all: intelligence, feeling, imagination, are reduced into paint. It strikes one at first with a sort of admiration; but it soon palls, and one becomes wearied at the lack of idea and predominance of sleight of hand.

That it should be pursued by the young men *usque ad nauseam* is, however, not to be wondered at, as, to a certain class of purchasers, it seems to possess irresistible charms. The drawers of Art-Union prizes generally select this description of pictures; and it is one argument, in addition to others equally good, in favor of your plan of selection, through a committee, (where thought and intention have some chance of respect,) rather than the other method which is adopted by the Art-Union here.

The exhibition of the British Institution is hardly, perhaps, up to its average excellence; but as I have only visited it once, and then in a hurried manner, I shall not presume to speak about other than those pictures which I particularly examined. Wilkie's *Penny Wedding* and Stuart Newton's *Le Malade Malgre Lui* so absorbed my attention, that I must confess to having taken but a cursory survey of the rest. The *Penny Wedding* from the Queen's collection, is in admirable preservation: it is so well known by engravings, that to speak of it at large, would be superfluous: it is an admirable work, studied with the utmost care, and full of character, vivacity, life, and motion. It has always seemed an anomaly to me, that Wilkie, who, it is evident, had a most keen appreciation of the humorous, as is evinced in his paintings, should have exhibited not a vestige of it in his letters, and as little, I have been told, in his conversation. It is only by looking again and again at his works that one can recover from the disagreeable impression of the man which his life, by Cunningham, presents. I somewhere heard or read an anecdote of him, which may not be *mal à propos*. In returning from a party with Newton, the latter was very diffuse in his conversation and commentaries; but Wilkie confined his remarks to a "*Rea-ally*." At length, Newton, tired with this phlegm, exclaimed, "Confound it, Wilkie! all I can get from you is '*really*.'" To which Wilkie's reply was, "*Railly*!" In some of the criticisms upon this exhibition, I perceive that in relation to the large class of *genre* painters who now exist here, the critics are disposed to assign a footstool to Newton. My own opinion is, that it should be a very high throne. The little painting which we have here is a capital example of

him, and, what is more, it is in excellent preservation, which, owing to his free use of asphaltum, can unfortunately be said of few of his pictures. The character of the unfortunate whom two doctors are trying to persuade into illness, is as fine as can be conceived; so are the "*Medicine Men*," with a rich grin under their gravity: the background figures contribute admirably to the story, and the whole is invested in color which goes straight to one's heart. Certainly, the footstool may be Newton, in so far as regards the painful elaboration of a petticoat or a pelisse; but in character, color, a genial mode of telling his story, and all that is comprised under the indefinite term of "*feeling*," the men who have followed him are but puny admirers—very good some of them were; but he, in his class, was supreme.

A matter of interest to the lovers of pictures during the season, is the sales, from death, from love of change, and other causes. Each year brings numerous collections to the hammer; and it is interesting and encouraging to the purchaser of modern works to find, that, with rare exceptions, the pictures, which have been well selected from the walls of the exhibition or the artists' studios during the last twenty years, more than repay the original outlay, with a liberal allowance of interest, and with some the appreciation amounts to several cent-per-cent. There is no doubt that the same result will obtain in the United States, if purchasers there will encourage the art which rises around them, instead of going to Italy, and (as I know of an instance) telling dealers that they want a thousand dollars' worth of pictures, and they must be good sized ones! I was explaining a short time since the prices which were obtained by Hunt and Cattermole here for small drawings, when my friend interrupted me to say that very *large* pictures were to be bought in Florence for *one hundred dollars*. So they are here, with very fine names attached to them too; but the real Simon Pures bring more than their weight in gold. It is amusing to see how the authority of great names vanishes before the searching scrutiny of the dealers. But let a *genuine* Claude, Murillo, Holbein, &c. &c., appear, and observe the difference. The small picture of a girl and dog, by Sir Joshua, which brought the other day a thousand guineas, was hardly more than a sketch; but it was in fine preservation; the child was indeed a child, in all its beauty and innocence, and the price, enormous as it seems, was not too much. But I have got to the end of my letter; so I subscribe myself, your obedient servant,

P.

CHRONICLE OF FACTS AND OPINIONS.

AMERICAN ART AND ARTISTS.

DRAWINGS BY OVERBECK.—In alluding again to these works, we are happy to include our remarks under the head of "*American Art*." The *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, which we mentioned in our last number as being for sale at Rome, has been lately purchased by Mr. Minturn, of this city, who, as we stated, was already the possessor of another specimen of this artist—one of the only two which are now in America. We have lately seen this drawing. Its subject is the *Garden of Gethsemane*. The foreground represents that part of the sacred history in which Christ coming to his disciples finds them sleeping. In the middle distance, according to the practice of the old masters, another scene in the same story is shewn—Christ kneeling in his